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WELSH

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Brotherly Love in Dostoevsky's

The Brothers Karamazov

(TITLE)

BY

Robert Welsh

THESIS

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Thesis Abstract

In The Brothers Karamazov, Dostoevsky explores two classical and interrelated problems: What is the nature of man? and what is the nature of God (if God exists)? There has been a good deal of critical debate concerning Dostoevsky's handling of these two problems. Many critics believe that Dostoevsky has merely made a dramatic restatement of these questions without offering any "answers" to them. Others believe that Dostoevsky's implied "answer" to the problems presented in The Brothers Karamazov is a negative one. In the novel Ivan Karamazov is the exponent of this negative response to these two questions. He believes that the idea of a just, merciful, and loving God is incompatible with the facts of life on this earth. The logical conclusion of Ivan's argument is that such a God does not and cannot exist.

But Dostoevsky also offers us a positive response to the "problem of human nature" and to the "problem of God." Father Zossima believes in a just, merciful, and loving God, and he believes in man's ability to love his fellow man and to return to God by the path of brotherly love.

This thesis examines the contrast between Ivan's view of man and God and Father Zossima's and supports the idea that Dostoevsky intended the teachings of the Russian monk to be a viable and meaningful response to these problems.

Dostoevsky supports Zossima's teaching in a number of ways. The most significant of these is the way in which

Dostoevsky presents and develops his characters. All three of the Karamazov brothers are searching for a way to make sense out of life, and searching for the truth within themselves that will guide them through life. And all three of them finally choose the direction that Zossima would have them take; all three of them are naturally and inevitably drawn into the path of brotherly love. It is not so much a question of Zossima's argument being "better" or "sounder" than Ivan's; Dostoevsky gives us his "solution" to the "problem of human nature" and to the "problem of God" in the actions of his protagonists. Ivan's argument "against God" is indeed powerfully stated, as Dostoevsky intended it to be. But Dostoevsky also intended "the whole book" to serve as an answer to that argument. This thesis supports the view that "the whole book" does in fact serve as a powerful and adequate response to the problems posed by Ivan Karamazov.

Brotherly Love in Dostoevsky's The Brothers Karamazov

In The Brothers Karamazov, Dostoevsky explores, within the framework of his narrative, two classical and interrelated problems: what is the nature of man? and, what is the nature of God (if God exists)? Through the character of Ivan Karamazov and his Legend of the Grand Inquisitor, Dostoevsky presents us, on the one hand, with a negative response to these two problems. Ivan's (and the Inquisitor's) argument states that man is "vile and weak"; that life is fraught with violence, cruelty, and injustice; and that the Christian conception of a just, merciful, and loving God is not compatible with the facts of life on this earth. The logical conclusion of this argument, then, is that such a God does not and cannot exist. On the other hand, Dostoevsky offers us a second, positive response to these two problems in the teachings of Father Zossima, which center on the concepts of brotherly love and universal human responsibility. Zossima believes that man's basic nature is good; that this good is of divine origin; and that man's ability to love his fellow man both originates in God and is the means by which we return to God through this life.

Ivan and Zossima approach these two problems -- of "human nature" and of "the nature of God" -- from two different perspectives, and arrive at two different conclusions. Ivan begins with a negative conception of

"human nature." Basing his logic on the idea that man was created "in the image of God," Ivan reasons that, if man is imperfect, so then must God also be. Ivan's conception of God follows from his understanding of human nature; Ivan's reasoning begins with "the nature of man" and arrives at "the nature of God." Zossima's view, on the other hand, is based on a positive conception of "the nature of God": he believes in a just, merciful, and loving God who has created man and also given him the ability to be just, merciful, and loving. Zossima's reasoning, then, begins with "the nature of God" and arrives at "the nature of man." In both cases "the nature of man" and the "nature of God" are intimately related one to the other. The differences in Ivan's and Zossima's conclusions result largely from the difference in the direction of each thinker's argument; that is, from the fact that Ivan reasons "from the nature of man to the nature of God" and Zossima "from the nature of God to the nature of man."

There has been much debate concerning Dostoevsky's final "position" with regard to these two problems. Some critics ask whether or not Dostoevsky has actually offered any "solutions" to the problems he has set for himself and whether he has not, instead, only made a powerful and dramatic restatement of them without putting forth any "solutions" at all. Robert Lord, for example, states that "Dostoevsky was inviting the reader to remain, like him, at the stage of either/or. If the reader surrenders to a

solution, that is not the novelist's responsibility, for Dostoevsky is continually hinting that solutions are to be resisted at all costs" (167). Other critics believe that the problems of human nature and of the nature of God (or of the existence or non-existence of God) as they are stated by Ivan in The Brothers Karamazov are either unanswerable or else answered in the negative by Dostoevsky. Nearly sixty years ago E. H. Carr stated that Ivan's argument "against God" is "not answered, and could not be answered, on the rational plane" (289). Dr. Robert Wharton notes that "since Carr virtually all major Dostoevskians have repeated either his view that Ivan is unanswerable within The Brothers Karamazov or his view that Ivan is unanswerable in actual fact" ("Dostoevsky's Theodicy" 568). Among those critics who have pointed out Dostoevsky's "failure" to provide an adequate "answer" to Ivan's arguments we may include Ernest Simmons, who writes that "on a purely rational basis, as Dostoevsky recognized, Ivan's thesis is absolutely unanswerable" (282), and Edward Wasiolek, who considered Ivan's rebellion to be "deep and powerful and unanswerable" (161). In any case, nearly all of Dostoevsky's critics agree that Ivan's indictments of both man and God are stated more clearly and are supported with better logic than are Zossima's more positive view of human nature and his conception of the just and merciful nature of God.[1]

Of course, there can be no "final" solution to the "problem of human nature" and even less so to the "problem

of God." Nevertheless men have always sought to understand themselves and struggled to comprehend the nature of God. As hopeless as this attempt to grasp the ungraspable may seem, it has occupied the minds of men for centuries and continues to do so because man has a natural inclination to seek out the divine in himself and in his world and to look for the source of his being and his world in a divine creator. It is difficult to believe that Dostoevsky addressed these issues in his works, using the terms he has used, only in order to draw the conclusion that there is no God and that there is nothing divine in man. On the contrary, it seems to me, Dostoevsky is from beginning to end simply searching for the right road to take in order to get to God. Along the way Dostoevsky brilliantly describes some of the obstacles that lie along man's path towards God, and takes us down some dark byways; but he always returns us to the main road, bringing us ever closer to the goal. The nature of man and the nature of God are never clearly and plainly drawn out for us in black and white; Dostoevsky knew that this was impossible. However, although we can never finally and completely come to know ourselves in this life, yet we can know something of ourselves; and although the nature of God must always remain in part a mystery to us, yet we can move towards God by means of our faith and of our ability to choose God and to act on our choices. There is a way, and man can find it and travel along it if he looks hard enough and makes the

effort: it is the Christian way, the way of brotherly love.

Father Zossima is the teacher of this way of brotherly love; and he also functions, according to Richard Peace, as "the living refutation of what the Grand Inquisitor represents" (276). Zossima's view of human nature and of the human situation is essentially positive. The command to "love one another" and the idea that "all men are responsible for all" are the cornerstones of Zossima's philosophy; the first step towards both earthly happiness and eternal salvation consists of striving to live in accordance with these fundamental Christian teachings. Zossima, in opposition to Ivan and his Inquisitor, believes that man is naturally inclined towards and capable of loving his fellow man and that in fulfilling the command to "love one another" man simply does what he was meant to do by his Creator. Zossima explains that it is only because this natural inclination to love our neighbor is distorted by or submerged under the pressures of modern life that we fail to make full use of God's gift of love to us.[2]

Ivan Karamazov is Zossima's philosophical antagonist in the novel. Ivan's view of human nature and of the human situation is essentially negative. He presents a formidable challenge to the teachings of the Russian monk with his bitter invective against human cruelty and injustice (in "Rebellion") and his indictment of man as a "vile and weak" creature (in "The Legend of the Grand

Inquisitor"). Ivan wants to know why God has seen fit to make man such a "vile and weak" creature, and how it is possible to love one's neighbor when in fact one's neighbor is so utterly unlovable. Man, Ivan tells us, is simply not equal to the challenge to love his fellow man, and does not recognize that he is responsible for and to his brothers, and is not willing to accept such a responsibility. Clearly Ivan does not believe that there is a natural inclination in man to love his neighbor; on the contrary, he seems to agree with the conclusions of the "natural sciences" that man is by nature selfish and that the "survival of the fittest" is the only universal law for all living things.[3]

Ivan and Zossima, then, approach these two problems, of "human nature" and of "the nature of God," from two different perspectives, and they necessarily arrive at differing conclusions. Ivan speaks of what man appears to be; based on his observations of human behavior, Ivan draws certain conclusions about man's basic nature, and then about the nature of God as the creator of man. Ivan's logic runs something like this: men are capable of committing monstrous acts of cruelty and violence, and man's history is filled with examples of cruelty, injustice, and perversion. Man is little more than a beast with a somewhat more highly developed brain than is common among the animals, which in man's case has only provided him with the means of perpetrating ever more ingenious acts

of cruelty against his fellow man. Whatever potential for good man possesses is often pushed to the side or submerged by his baser instincts. Given such a conception of the human animal, what are we to infer about the nature of its creator? How can we accept the idea of a just and merciful creator who has made a being capable of monstrous acts of cruelty and injustice? This problem, as Ivan has stated it, is indeed a knotty one. But it is clear that a good part of Ivan's problem results from the manner in which he has stated it, from the fact that he is approaching the nature of God starting from the nature of man. If the same problem is stated in other terms and approached from another point of view, if the nature of man is approached starting from the nature of God, then both problems become more open to solution.

Zossima, in contrast to Ivan, speaks not of what man appears to be based on certain of his actions, but of what man is in essence. Zossima does not deny the fact that men do evil; but he does reject the notion that the basic nature of man is evil and that man is naturally inclined to do evil rather than good. Zossima sees the evil that man does not as the realization of his inner nature, but as a perversion of that nature. For Zossima, God has created man as a being of essential goodness, but that goodness is often distorted or suppressed by a combination of external (social) pressures and internal (individual) weaknesses, and this is where the problem of evil arises. Zossima

believes that, despite the undeniable presence of evil in the world (which he does not in any way try to justify), man contains within himself a vast natural potential for goodness and for righteous action, which originates in God and which only needs to be acknowledged and then actively developed in order for the tide of evil to be stemmed. That the tide of evil will eventually be turned back by man's greater realization of his potential goodness, Zossima is fully convinced. For Zossima the problem of evil is only a temporary, though admittedly formidable, obstacle to the development of man's higher being.

Zossima does not directly address the problems of injustice and man's inhumanity to man. It is probably because Zossima never directly deals with these problems in terms similar to those in which Ivan has stated them that many critics have taken the view that Dostoevsky considered Ivan's argument "against God" to be either unassailable or at least not adequately answered within the novel. But the "answer" to Ivan's argument is to be found not just in the teachings of the Russian monk, but also in the whole story of the novel itself,[4] and in a proper understanding of the characters of the three brothers and of their ongoing development throughout the story. Zossima gives us his definition of the Christian attitude towards life in his precepts that "all men are responsible for all" and that we must "love one another." The three brothers then show us, by their attitudes towards one another, how these precepts

may be followed even by people who are far short of being perfect Christians, and even by one who professes to deny Christian teachings altogether.

But Dostoevsky's purpose in writing the novel was not merely to pose metaphysical and religious problems and then to give the "solutions" to them. He was also writing a dramatic and suspenseful story. And in the story of The Brothers Karamazov we are presented with three powerful characters; with certain conflicts which arise within them and between them both preceding and following upon the murder of their father (and in Alyosha's case, as a result of the death of Father Zossima); and with the evolution of the spirit which takes place within each brother during the course of these events. All three brothers undergo a spiritual crisis; "all of them," as Konstantin Mochulsky notes, "are purified in suffering and attain a new life" (598). As each brother passes through his individual crisis, he comes to his own realization of the truth of Zossima's maxim that "everyone is really responsible for all men to all men and for everything" (301).

It has often been noted by critics that the character of Alyosha is not nearly so vividly drawn as are those of his brothers, and that, although Dostoevsky calls Alyosha the "hero" of his story, he is not a very compelling one. But as Konstantin Mochulsky points out, "the main hero of The Brothers Karamazov is the three brothers in their spiritual unity" (598), and it is Alyosha's function to

embody the gentle and loving aspect of this unity.[5] In contrast to Dmitri's violent sensuality and Ivan's intense and tortured intellect, Alyosha's mildness makes him appear pale by comparison. But a closer look at Alyosha reveals him to be a powerful figure in his own right. In Alyosha the flame of faith burns as steadily and brightly as do the fires of passion in Dmitri's soul and the desire for truth in Ivan's. And, in spite of his apparent mildness, Alyosha possesses in common with his brothers that same "base" Karamazov lust for life. As Alyosha tells Lise: "I, too, am a Karamazov" (226).

Dostoevsky states directly that Alyosha is the "hero" of his story in the first sentence of the novel: "In beginning the life story of my hero, Alexey Fyodorovich Karamazov, I find myself in somewhat of a quandary." He then admits that Alyosha is a "protagonist, but a protagonist vague and undefined," and says that "this man is odd, even eccentric." But he goes on to qualify this, noting that "it happens sometimes that such a person...carries within himself the very heart of the universal, and the rest of the men of his epoch have for some reason been temporarily torn from it, as if by a great gust of wind..." Thus Dostoevsky has already anticipated the criticisms that will be applied to his hero, but says that "for me he is remarkable" (xi).

Dostoevsky's admiration for his hero is evident in his initial description of the twenty-year-old Alyosha:

> First of all, I must explain that this young man, Alyosha, was not a fanatic, and, in my opinion, at least, was not even a mystic... He was simply an early lover of humanity, and that he adopted the monastic life was simply because at that time it struck him, so to say, as the ideal escape for his soul struggling from the awareness of worldly wickedness to the light of love (14).

Alyosha is quiet and reserved

> ...but he was fond of people: yet no one had ever looked on him as a simple or naive person. There was something about him which made one feel at once (and it was so all his life afterwards) that he did not care to be a judge of others, that he would never take it upon himself to criticize and would never condemn anyone for anything. He seemed, indeed, to accept everything without the least condemnation though often grieving bitterly, and this was so much so that no one could surprise or frighten him even in his earliest youth (15).

What we see here is nothing like the type of the pale mystic with which the character of Alyosha is often labeled. He is simply a young man who is naturally inclined towards goodness, who "did not care to be a judge

of others," and whom "nothing could surprise or frighten...even in his earliest youth." The impression here is one of a quiet inner strength coupled with a generous open-heartedness, and this image of Alyosha is maintained throughout the novel.

Alyosha's inner strength is tested, and he has his moments of doubt and hesitation; but the abundant goodness of his heart and the steady strength of his faith bring him through this test. However, he is not a saint; he is linked not only by blood but also by temperament with his father and his brothers. Konstantin Mochulsky says of his connection to Dmitri:

> Alyosha sets his quietness in opposition to Dmitri's violence, his purity to his sensuousness; but even in his modest chastity lives the Karamazov element, he also knows the gnawing of sensuality. They are different and alike: The ecstatic sense of life mysteriously unites them. Therefore Dmitri's sin is Alyosha's sin (599).

And, like his brother Ivan, Alyosha is capable of doubt. Anticipating the death of his beloved elder and questioning his own suitability for the monastic life, Alyosha tells Lise:

> "And perhaps I don't even believe in God."
>
> "You don't believe in God? What is the matter?" said Lise quietly and gently. But

> Alyosha did not answer. There was something too mysterious, too subjective in these last words of his, perhaps obscure to himself, but yet torturing him (299).

How very like Ivan Alyosha appears in this passage! Recall Zossima's words to Ivan at the monastery: "The question is still fretting your heart, and not answered... That question you have not answered, and it is your great grief, for it clamors for an answer" (70). Later, amidst the indecorous tumult following Zossima's death, Alyosha's faith is shaken in earnest:

> He loved his God and believed in Him steadfastly, though he was suddenly murmuring against Him. Yet a vague but tormenting and evil impression left by his conversation with Ivan the day before suddenly revived again now in his soul and seemed forcing its way to the surface of his consciousness (356-57).

Ivan has planted a seed in Alyosha's mind, and, nurtured by the morbid excitement surrounding the death of Father Zossima, that seed grows for a time into a solid feeling of doubt.

But Alyosha's faith is soon restored to him. In the brilliant chapter "Cana of Galilee," Alyosha falls asleep during a reading of the Gospels over the body of Father Zossima. He dreams of the wedding at Cana, where Christ "worked his first miracle to help men's gladness" (378),

and he sees Father Zossima there. Alyosha awakens from his dream and goes out into a gloriously beautiful night; he falls on the earth and kisses it, "watering it with his tears," and vows "passionately to love it, to love it for ever and ever" (380-81). He feels anew his "contact with other worlds" and longs to "forgive everyone and for everything...not for himself, but for all men, for all and everything" (381). Alyosha's faith in God and in the teachings of his elder concerning the brotherhood of man has been renewed and strengthened in him. What has happened to Alyosha is nothing short of a revelation:

> But with every instant he felt clearly and, as it were, tangibly, that something firm and unshakable as that vault of heaven had entered into his soul. It was as though some idea had seized the sovereignty of his mind -- and it was for all his life and for ever and ever. He had fallen on the earth a weak boy, but he rose up a resolute champion, and he knew and felt it suddenly at the very moment of his ecstasy. And never, never, all his life long, could Alyosha forget that minute (381).

With his faith thus renewed, Alyosha is prepared to meet the challenges that lie before him. His brothers, Ivan and Dmitri, are about to undergo their own trials by ordeal; Alyosha will act as healer and confessor to both of them.

Father Zossima had earlier stated that hell is "the suffering of not being able to love" (338). Alyosha, believing in man's responsibility to his fellow man and in the power of love (God's and man's), will be challenged to guide each of his two brothers out of his own individual hell. Dmitri's private hell is a result of his violent and passionate nature; he is capable of a genuine, gentle, and Christ-like love, but has not yet managed to rise above the over-abundance of sensuality which he has inherited from his father. Ivan's self-made hell is more complex: rejecting "God's world" but thirsting after "God's truth," desiring Katerina Ivanovna and despising himself for his desire, hating Dmitri but feeling compelled to help him, Ivan is a volatile mass of conflicting thoughts and impulses. Dmitri and Ivan will each turn to Alyosha, Dostoevsky's "resolute champion," to make their "confessions;" and both of them (Dmitri openly, Ivan covertly) will take their younger brother for their spiritual ideal. Both of them will come to realize that Alyosha possesses a quality that is lacking (or at least only half-formed) in them, and which they need in order to fully realize their humanity. Thus, as Richard Peace has written, "The claim that Alyosha is at the center of the novel is fully justified; yet the novel is not identified with him; its hero is not one man; it is a brotherhood" (226).

Ivan Karamazov is certainly among the most complex and elusive of all Dostoevsky's creations. The following exchange between Ivan and Alyosha, which takes place immediately following Dmitri's attack upon their father, is at once revealing and misleading:

> "Damn it all, if I hadn't pulled him away perhaps he'd have murdered him. It wouldn't take much to do for old Aesop, would it?" whispered Ivan to Alyosha.
>
> "God forbid!" cried Alyosha.
>
> "Why should He forbid?" Ivan went on in the same whisper, with a malignant grimace. "One reptile will devour another. And serve them both right too."
>
> Alyosha shuddered (146-47).

Ivan, apparently, regards the human race with a cold and cynical eye, loathes his father and his elder brother, and seems not the least bit disturbed by the thought of that brother murdering his father. But Ivan Karamazov is not so inhuman as all that.[6] His attitude towards his fellow man is something of a paradox. He is very much like the doctor (whose story is related by Father Zossima) who says that "it has always happened that the more I detest men individually the more ardent becomes my love for humanity" (56). But in Ivan's case this strange situation is reversed: it is his ardent and unfulfilled love for humanity which has led him to despise individual men. We

can plainly see that Ivan is, like his brother Alyosha, an "early lover of humanity," in whom this love has not been able to find its proper expression and has become temporarily submerged beneath powerful currents of violent emotion and intellectual despair.

Ivan has made a collection of "anecdotes" of man's inhumanity to man (and of acts of violence and cruelty against children in particular) and he has, in effect, thereby poisoned his attitude towards the human race. Yet Ivan is still, for all his apparent cynicism, an idealist. The very fact that he is so passionately concerned with the "eternal questions" of God and man, of good and evil, of truth and justice, and that he longs for earthly justice and finds it so hard to accept the excessive amount of evil in this world, shows that his heart is still yearning for the good of mankind. It is the apparent paradox of God's inclusion of excessive evil in His creation that has turned Ivan away from "God's world": "Do you understand why this infamy must be and is permitted? Without it, I am told, man could not have existed on earth, for he could not know good and evil. Why should he know that diabolical good and evil when it costs so much?" (251).

Why must this world contain such an excessive amount of evil alongside the good it contains? Why must man "know that diabolical good and evil when it costs so much?" Father Zossima has made a reply to these questions of

Ivan's, although his response to this problem certainly does not satisfy the young philosopher:

> "Much on earth is hidden from us, but to make up for that we have been given a precious mystic sense of our living bond with the other world, with the higher heavenly world, and the roots of our thoughts and feelings are not here but in other worlds. That is why the philosophers say that we cannot apprehend the reality of things on earth" (336).

Zossima is telling us that, perhaps, there are some things that we simply cannot know and will never understand about this life. But we do have a "living bond" with the other world, and our desire to know and understand, our thoughts and feelings, originate in this other world. Ivan's desire to make sense of these "eternal questions," then, is itself of divine origin. The creation is in itself a mystery, and certain aspects of that creation are and will always remain mysteries beyond our ability to comprehend.

For all his bitter condemnation of his fellow man and of "God's world," Ivan confesses to a "frantic and perhaps unseemly thirst for life" (238). Ivan is no longer speaking of that "base" Karamazov lust for life, however, but of something of a considerably higher order when he confides to Alyosha: "Though I may not believe in the order of the universe, yet I love the sticky little leaves

as they open in spring. I love the blue sky, I love some people, whom one loves you know sometimes without knowing why" (239).

Here, then, is the paradox that is Ivan Karamazov. He loves mankind, but hates the things men are capable of doing to one another. He does love "some people," but at the same time apparently hates his father and his elder brother, who represent, for him, what is worst in mankind, and what is worst in himself. He despises in himself the "frantic and perhaps unseemly thirst for life" which he shares in common with his father and his brothers, and yet he is able to love life for its own sake, for the "sticky little leaves as they open in spring," for "the blue sky," and, perhaps, for the sake of "some people" whom he "loves without knowing why."

For all his condemnation of the human race and of "God's world," Ivan nevertheless acts in a way that suggests that he, too, somewhere in his heart, believes that "everyone is really responsible to all men for all men and for everything." Ivan had earlier proposed a view of the human situation directly opposed to this teaching of Zossima's (here summarized by Miusov at the gathering in the monastery):

> "Only five days ago...he solemnly declared in argument that there was nothing in the whole world to make men love their neighbors. That there was no law of nature that men should love

> mankind, and that, if there had been any love on earth hitherto, it was not owing to a natural law, but simply because men have believed in immortality. Ivan Fyodorovich added in parenthesis that the whole natural law lies in that faith, and that if you were to destroy in mankind the belief in immortality, not only love but every living force maintaining the life of the world would dry up. Moreover, nothing would be immoral, everything would be lawful, even cannibalism" (69).

Zossima tells Ivan that "you are blessed in believing that, or else most unhappy" (69). His comment is very much to the point. Ivan is indeed a very unhappy young man whose reasoning and philosophizing has led him to embrace a view of life which is opposed to the natural impulses of his heart. Ivan is apparently acting in accordance with this view of life (as if "everything is lawful" for one who does not believe) when he "allows" the murder of Fyodor Pavlovich to take place. But look closely at how Dostoevsky has rendered this part of the story. To begin with, Ivan does not even want to admit to himself that he has understood and acknowledged Smerdyakov's "offer" to murder his father upon his departure from Fyodor Pavlovich's house. If Ivan truly believed that "everything is lawful" he could have said aloud to Smerdyakov, "Yes, go ahead and murder my father, it is nothing to me." Instead

of this, we have a brilliant description of a man embroiled in a tangle of guilt and self-deception. Here is Ivan as we find him during his first interview with Smerdyakov after the murder of Fyodor Pavlovich:

> His chief feeling was one of relief that it was not Smerdyakov, but Mitya, who had committed the murder, although he might have been expected to feel the opposite. He did not want to analyze the reason for this feeling, and even felt a positive repugnance at prying into his sensations. He felt as though he wanted to make haste to forget something. In the following days he became convinced of Mitya's guilt, as he got to know all the weight of evidence against him (647).

Ivan had tacitly given Smerdyakov permission to murder his father as he departed for Chermashnaya, but had barely acknowledged to himself what he was about. Now Smerdyakov has committed the murder, and despite Ivan's willingness to believe in Dmitri's guilt, his conscience will not let him rest. Aggravated by his passion for Katerina Ivanovna and by her continued "devotion" to Dmitri, Ivan's hatred for his brother is redoubled, and he tries to suppress his feeling of guilt by forcing himself to believe that Dmitri, and not Smerdyakov, is the real murderer. But Ivan is unsuccessful in this endeavor. He cannot rid himself of his burden of guilt because he knows that in fact

everything is not permitted, that men are answerable for their actions. The consequences of Ivan's struggles with this great guilt are the nightmare in which he meets his alter-ego in the form of the devil, and his subsequent mental and emotional breakdown.

Ivan is tortured not only by the fact that he is partially responsible for the murder of his father. He is struggling within himself both with the problem of his responsibility for his own actions and with the larger problem of his responsibility to all men. In this struggle he turns to Alyosha, if not directly for guidance then at least for some kind of inspiration in his attempt to climb out of the moral and philosophical labyrinth in which he has imprisoned himself. He admits to Alyosha in the tavern "perhaps I want to be healed by you" (245). But in order to be healed Ivan must first acknowledge his responsibility towards his fellow man.

It is interesting to note that even before Ivan is ready to acknowledge his responsibility towards his brother and even while he denies that such a responsibility exists, he nevertheless acts on Dmitri's behalf. Ivan is passing through the greatest trial of his life and is being tested in a number of ways. His passion for Katerina Ivanovna alternates between love and hate; his feeling of guilt in the murder of his father is struggling to the surface of his consciousness; his love of the truth has been thwarted by the necessity to deceive himself; and he is on the verge

of a mental breakdown. Despite all these pressures, Ivan does not abandon Dmitri and attempts to intervene on his behalf. Although it is painful and maddening for him to be near Katerina Ivanovna, he continues to see her because "as long as I don't break off with her, she won't ruin that monster, knowing how I want to get him out of trouble" (637). There is nothing in Ivan's professed beliefs that would compel him to endure so much for the sake of his brother. It is not reasonable to suppose that Ivan is motivated by guilt alone to try and save Dmitri from having to suffer for Ivan's own crime; Ivan has not yet fully admitted that guilt to himself. Ivan is simply unable, despite himself and despite his philosophy, to abandon his brother in his time of need. Perhaps (and this is, of course, a common occurrence in Dostoevsky) Ivan truly loves the brother he hates so much.

Finally Smerdyakov forces Ivan to confront the truth which he has known in his heart all along. When Smerdyakov tells him directly that he did in fact murder Fyordor Pavlovich, Ivan immediately thinks of the song "Vanka's gone to Petersburg." A drunken peasant had been singing that song when Ivan ran into him and brutally knocked him down into the snow, leaving him there to freeze to death. When Ivan finally faces the truth regarding his share of the responsibility for the murder of his father, the fact that he is also responsible not only for his own actions but also for his brother and for all men immediately dawns

upon him. Ivan is confronted, then, with several truths at once: he is responsible in part for the murder of his father; he is responsible for his brother Dmitri; he is responsible, ultimately, to all his fellow men.

Upon leaving Smerdyakov, Ivan takes the first few steps in the direction in which his heart has been longing for him to turn: "Something like joy was springing up in his heart. He was conscious of unbounded resolution; he would make an end of the wavering that had so tortured him of late" (671). He finds the unconscious peasant in the snow, takes him to a police station and provides for his care. And then he goes home to meet the devil.

Ivan's confrontation with the devil is actually a further confrontation with himself. The devil's mocking reiteration of Ivan's theories, and Ivan's bitter and sarcastic response to these echoes of his own ideas -- "'Philosophical reflections again?' Ivan snarled malignantly" (680) -- reveal that he has grown weary of his philosophy and has begun to realize that this philosophy cannot give any satisfactory solutions to the problems with which he has been concerned.

Ivan's conversation with his alter-ego is interrupted by the arrival of Alyosha bearing with him the news of Smerdyakov's suicide. Greatly agitated by the realizations that are being forced upon him, Ivan makes a sort of feverish confession to Alyosha in the following exchange:

"And you are quite convinced that there has been someone here?"

"Yes, on that sofa in the corner. You would have driven him away. You did drive him away: he disappeared when you arrived. I love your face, Alyosha. Did you know that I loved your face? And he is myself, Alyosha. All that's base in me, all that's mean and contemptible. Yes, I am a romantic. He guessed it...though it's a libel. He is frightfully stupid, but it's to his advantage. He has cunning, animal cunning -- he knew how to infuriate me. He kept taunting me with believing in him, and that was how he made me listen to him. He fooled me like a boy. He told me a great deal that was true about myself, though. I should never have owned it to myself" (692).

How deeply Ivan despises this devil, and yet he is forced to admit that his alter-ego has "told me a great deal that was true about myself." And so the devil has ended by doing Ivan a great service: he has shown him the falseness of a number of his ideas, and thereby reinforced Ivan's resolution to stand up for the truth, to defend his brother, and to accept the responsibilities which formerly his philosophy of "everything is lawful" had allowed him to evade. His conscience, which he had earlier described as something man has "made up" for himself, has finally

asserted itself in Ivan, forcing him to reexamine the view he has taken of life. And, philosophy or no philosophy, Ivan will act in accordance with the dictates of that conscience, which is more powerful than his reasonings, and which is certainly something far greater than a mere product of his imagination.

Alyosha, once again acting in the role of confessor and spiritual caretaker to his brother, puts Ivan to bed and watches over him for a time. Ivan is now at the turning point of his spiritual crisis, as Alyosha fully comprehends:

> As he fell asleep he prayed for Mitya and Ivan. He began to understand Ivan's illness. "The anguish of a proud determination. An earnest conscience!" God, in Whom he disbelieved, and His truth were gaining mastery over his heart, which refused to submit... Alyosha smiled softly. "God will conquer!" he thought. "He will either rise up in the light of truth or...he'll perish in hate, revenging on himself and on everyone his having served the cause he does not believe in," Alyosha added bitterly, and again he prayed for Ivan (694).

It is plain to see by the way in which he has rendered the details of Ivan's spiritual "trial by ordeal" what Dostoevsky is saying through the character of Ivan Karamazov. Ivan is suffering because he has "served the

cause he does not believe in." Konstantin Mochulsky has said of Dostoevsky's work that "all his great novels are devoted to struggling against the seductions of atheistic love for mankind. Love for men can only be in Christ and man's brotherhood is possible only on a Christian foundation..." (563). It is clear that the "atheistic love for mankind" expressed by the creator of the Grand Inquisitor is not enough for Ivan; and, in fact, it is a false kind of love; it is not love at all. Mochulsky goes on to say that, in The Brothers Karamazov, Dostoevsky "daringly asserts that without belief in God and the immortality of the soul, love for mankind can be transformed into hate" (563). Ivan has been living on the borderline between love and hate for humanity. He has stated these problems for himself in such a way that he must choose between God and genuine love for humanity on the one hand, and, on the other hand, a vague sort of "atheistic love for humanity" which really only amounts to hatred in the final analysis. Ivan says that he cannot accept "God's world"; but neither can he give up his idealistic love for mankind, his ardent desire for truth and justice, his deep love of life. Where do these finer impulses come from then? What prompts Ivan to act on Dmitri's behalf even when he seems to feel nothing but hatred towards his brother? Dostoevsky's answer to these questions is obvious. As Father Paissy tells Alyosha "...even those who have renounced Christianity and attack

it, in their inmost being still follow the Christian ideal" (177). Ivan is a perfect example of this. The author of the Legend of the Grand Inquisitor, who has said that Christ's plan for mankind will not work and does not make sense, cannot himself be satisfied with any other plan; and it is towards Christ and the Christian ideal of brotherly love that Ivan has been moving all along.

We have seen that Alyosha and Ivan share certain qualities in common: both are idealists; both are deeply concerned with the "eternal questions"; both of them are committed to seeking out and living in accordance with the truth (insofar as they are able to understand it); and both of them possess a deeply-rooted sense of right and wrong, a moral conscience to which they must always answer. And both Alyosha and Ivan are extremists: they wholly and unreserveldy commit themselves to follow to the end the paths by which they have chosen to seek the truth, Alyosha by way of the spirit and Ivan by way of the intellect.

The third and oldest Karamazov brother, Dmitri, is an extremist of another kind: he is a sensualist who, like his father, consciously and completely gives himself over to that violent and seemingly unquenchable lust for life which is the common trait of all the Karamazovs. And yet, although this "frantic and perhaps unseemly thirst for life" is carried to excess in Dmitri, he still shares to an extent the spiritual and intellectual inclinations of his younger brothers. Avrahm Yarmolinsky has said of Dmitri

that "for all his physical exuberance, he has a longing for spiritual grace, even at the moment of utter debasement. The time comes when he is distressed...by the question of the existence of God. Again, like the others, he is wide-hearted" (385). Dmitri, too, will be put to the test; Dmitri, too, will suffer and will reexamine the things he has lived for as he undergoes the greatest trial of his life. He will finally come to realize that the sensual kind of love which he has always lived for is only one aspect of a much greater love, the love of a man for all his fellow men, in other words, Christ-like love, the highest kind of love to which a man can aspire.

We first meet Dmitri at the "unfortunate gathering" at the monastery, at which he had hoped to make some step towards reconciling his differences with his father. In this initial description of Dmitri's physical appearance we are given hints as to the nature of the internal conflict which has already begun within him:

> His rather large, prominent eyes had an expression of firm determination, and yet there was a vague look in them, too. Even when he was excited and talking irritably, his eyes somehow did not follow his mood, but betrayed something else, something quite incongruous with what was passing... People who saw something pensive and sullen in his eyes were startled by his sudden laugh, which bore witness to mirthful and

> lighthearted thoughts at the very time when his eyes were so gloomy. A certain strained look in his face was easy to understand at this moment (67).

Dmitri is something more, then, than just a thoughtless and carefree sensualist. Dmitri will prove to be a considerably deeper character than he appears to be at first glance. Following the outrageous confrontation which takes place between Dmitri and his father in the elder's cell, Father Zossima bows down to the "great suffering" which he sees in store for Dmitri. As his story unfolds, we see that that suffering is of a considerably nobler and deeper sort than we might at first have expected of Dmitri.

Dmitri, like Ivan, makes his "confession" to Alyosha, and we see at once that Dmitri, too, is as deeply concerned with the "eternal questions" as are his two brothers. However, for Dmitri these "eternal questions" are inextricably bound up with that excess of passion which wells up from the center of his being. His attempt to come to terms with these questions takes the form of his efforts, if not to rise above these passions of his, then at least to transform them into something of a higher order, to exchange his base "ideal of Sodom" for the divine "ideal of the Madonna." Dmitri tells Alyosha that "there's a terrible lot of suffering for man on earth, a terrible lot of trouble" (109). Like Ivan, he is deeply troubled by man's sufferings; and, like Ivan again, he is perplexed by

the inscrutable order of things in this world of ours: "That's the trouble, for everything is a riddle!" (110). However, despite all his confusion, Dmitri already understands the direction in which his salvation must lie; it is only his "base" Karamazov nature that has kept him from making the first step in that direction:

> "For I'm a Karamazov! For when I do leap into the pit, I go headlong with my heels up, and am pleased to be falling in that degrading attitude, and pride myself upon it. And in the very depths of that degradation I begin a hymn of praise. Let me be vile and base, only let me kiss the hem of the veil in which my God is shrouded. Though I may follow the devil, I am Thy son, O Lord, and I love Thee, and I feel the joy without which the world cannot stand" (110).

Following this confession, Dmitri states the essence of his problem in terms of what he calls "beauty": the "ideal of Sodom" versus the "ideal of the Madonna." He tells Alyosha that "for the immense mass of mankind beauty is found in Sodom.... The awful thing is that beauty is mysterious as well as terrible. God and the devil are fighting there and the battlefield is the heart of man" (111). We can see that Dmitri understands perfectly well that the kind of "beauty" he has known and sought all his life is not at all what he yearns for in his innermost soul. Dmitri is "a man of lofty mind and heart," and

though he has followed the "ideal of Sodom" he has never renounced the "ideal of the Madonna." Like Ivan, Dmitri is a paradox, and in him "the boundaries meet and all contradictions exist side by side" (111).

Through the course of events leading up to and following the murder of Fyodor Pavlovich, Dmitri undergoes a severe emotional trial, and out of this trial emerges a new man, ready, willing, and able at last to take the first step towards the resolution of all these inner conflicts. In the end, Dmitri's "ideal of the Madonna" triumphs over his "ideal of Sodom" (just as conscience and commitment to his fellow man triumphs over intellectual despair and cynicism in Ivan). This, it seems to me, is yet another indication of where Dostoevsky himself stood in relation to these "eternal questions" and shows in what direction he believed the answers to these questions must be sought. The parallels between Ivan's and Dmitri's spiritual ordeals are remarkable, and the fact that their separate trials lead them both to the conclusion that "everyone is really responsible to all men for all men and for everything" is surely nothing less than an intentional reinforcement of Zossima's teachings.

Although Ivan does not plainly and directly embrace this teaching, we have already seen that he acts in accordance with it; whereas Dmitri's ecstatic "conversion" directly echoes Zossima's own words: "Brother, these last two months I've found myself a new man... It's for the

babe I'm going. Because we're all responsible for all... Hail to God in His joy: I love Him!" (627-28).

Ivan's "acceptance" of Zossima's truth is not so vocal as this, but is expressed in actions rather than in words: having faced certain truths about himself and having realized the falseness of many of his ideas, Ivan immediately begins to act with responsibility "to all men for all men," first by aiding the drunken peasant and then by devoting himself to saving Dmitri.

There is also a remarkable parallel between Dmitri's dream of "the babe" and its mother and Alyosha's ecstatic experience following his dream about the wedding at Cana. Recall how Alyosha had "fallen on the earth a weak boy, but...rose up a resolute champion," and how he kissed the earth, "watering it with his tears, and vowed passionately to love it, to love it for ever and ever" (381). Now compare Dmitri's experience with Alyosha's:

> And he felt that a passion of pity, such as he had never known before, was rising in his heart, that he wanted to cry, that he wanted to do something for them all, so that the babe would weep no more, so that the dark-faced, dried-up mother should not weep, so that no one should shed tears from that moment... And his heart grieved, and he struggled forward to the light, and he longed to live, to live, to go on and on, towards the new, beckoning light...

> "I've had a good dream, gentlemen," he said in a strange voice, with a new light, as of joy, in his face (537-38).

Alyosha and Dmitri, then, both have a "good dream" as they stand at the threshold of a new life and of renewed faith in God and in the Christian ideal of love for one's fellow man. In Ivan's case, the nightmare in which the devil mocks him with his own ideas is a purgatory rather than a revelatory experience, forcing him to let go of a number of false notions and bringing him to a similar threshold. For Ivan this threshold will be much more difficult to cross, since he is still by temperament and inclination stuck in the mold of the intellectual doubter and skeptic. However, even Dostoevsky's greatest doubter and skeptic has all along been reaching out for something more than just an idea: he has been, like Dmitri and Alyosha, reaching out towards Christ.

We have taken a close look at the similarities between the soul-transforming experiences of the three brothers Karamazov. Each brother has undergone a trial by ordeal. Alyosha's faith in God and his ability to carry out the teachings of his elder have been tried in the crucible of experience. Ivan's complacency in unbelief and his philosophically-derived understanding of the human situation have been put to a similar test. For Dmitri, this trial has developed as he has sought his "ideal of the Madonna" and left behind the "ideal of Sodom." Each of the

brothers had been, at the opening of the novel, still only a half-formed personality in some respects. The trials they have undergone throughout the course of the story have brought something new to life in each of them. Each brother has had to leave something behind that had been a hindrance to him in his gradual progression towards the understanding of a greater truth. Alyosha had been secure in his faith, and that faith had grown quietly and steadily within the monastery walls and with the help and guidance of Father Zossima; but the teacher had understood that he must send his pupil out into the world in order for his faith to be tested and strengthened by a broader experience of life and of the joys and sufferings of his fellow man. Ivan had been certain of the ideas of man and the world at which he had arrived after long and penetrating reflections upon the human situation; but there is more to "God's world" and to mankind than Ivan has been able to conceive of with his mind alone, and his soul yearns for a higher truth, and the road to that truth takes Ivan from doubt to self-doubt and, finally, to sickness and suffering, that is to say, along the classic Dostoevskian road towards Christ and salvation. Dmitri had been committed only to his passions and their fulfillment, all the time knowing that there is a higher life worth striving for but not believing himself capable of rising above those passions; but Dmitri's reckless career comes to a tragic end and he rises

above his baser nature and goes forth to take up the cross he must bear with joy in his heart.

Dostoevsky has given us a brilliant portrait of three dynamic individuals all of whom have arrived at once at a great crossroads in their lives. The fact that they all finally choose to move on in the same direction at the novel's close must not be lost upon the reader. Again and again throughout the story the value of universal human responsibility, the idea of man's responsibility towards his fellow man, has been demonstrated and reinforced in word and in action. All three brothers carry within them that "base" Karamazov love of life; but the love of life is in itself not base; there is also a "divine" aspect of this singular "Karamazov" love of life as well, and it exists within and is expressed by all three brothers.

Each brother carries within him the divine form of this love of life, and each of them fulfills in his own way the exhortation of Father Zossima:

> "Love all God's creation, the whole and every grain of sand in it. Love every leaf, every ray of God's light. Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything you will perceive the divine mystery in things" (334).

First we see how Alyosha embraces this teaching:

> Alyosha stood, gazed, and suddenly threw himself down upon the earth. He did not know why he

> embraced it. He could not have told why he longed so irresistibly to kiss it, to kiss it all. But he kissed it weeping, sobbing and watering it with his tears, and vowed passionately to love it, to love it for ever and ever (380-81).

And then there is Ivan:

> "Though I may not believe in the order of the universe, yet I love the sticky little leaves as they open in spring. I love the blue sky, I love some people, whom one loves sometimes you know without knowing why" (239).

And finally there is Dmitri quoting Schiller's "Hymn to Joy":

> "Would he purge his soul from vileness/And attain to light and worth/He must turn and cling forever/To his ancient Mother earth" (110).

To love God's creation is to love God, and there can be no doubt that these are men who love God's world, who, with all their hearts, affirm that life is good and worth living. Within the framework of The Brothers Karamazov, Dostoevsky has brilliantly and provocatively restated some of the "eternal questions" with which man has always been concerned since the search for truth and the search for God had their beginnings among men. And however powerfully Dostoevsky has rendered the darker sides of these problems, there can be no question that in the final analysis The Brothers Karamazov is a work rich in hope, compassion, and

the love of God's creation. We miss the point of Dostoevsky's works entirely if we regard them, as D. S. Mirsky did, as "irreducible tragedies that cannot be solved or pacified" (275). They are, in fact, not tragedies at all, but celebrations of the great mystery that is man's life on earth.

Notes

[1]Dostoevsky himself expressed concern over this point in a letter to C. P. Pobedonostsev of 24 August 1879:

> Your opinion of what you have read of the Karamazovs...was very flattering, but at that point you pose the most pressing problem that I have not yet given the answer to all those atheistical propositions, and that it must be done. Exactly so, and in this all my care and anxiety now reside. For the sixth book, "A Russian Monk"... is intended to answer all that negative side. And so I tremble for it in this sense: will it be a sufficient answer? Especially as the answer is not in fact direct, not an answer point by point to the theses previously expressed (in "The Grand Inquisitor" and earlier), but only by implication. It is presented as the direct opposite of the view of the world stated earlier -- but again not presented point by point, but as an artistic picture so to speak. This is what disturbs me, i.e., will it be understood, and shall I achieve even a part of my aim? (Coulson 224).

And again in another letter dated 16 August 1880:

> Every time I write anything and have it printed I am in a sort of fever. It is not that I don't believe in what I myself have written, but all

> the same I am tormented by the question of how it will be received, whether people will want to understand the essential point and whether I shall not turn out to have done more harm than good by making public my inmost convictions. Especially as I am always obliged to express some ideas only in their basic form, very much in need of more development and persuasion (Coulson 229-30).

[2]Dr. Robert Wharton comments that "Zossima believes that the natural impulse of men is to love and live forever" and goes on to say that

> ...in Zossima's view, "the experience of active love" is sheerly natural for creatures made "in the image and likeness" of a God of love and not to experience such love is an abnormality testifying at once to the power of certain social and psychic pressures and to an individual's capacity, in Dmitri's words, "to put one's personality in contradiction to one's reality."

Dr. Wharton also notes that

> Zossima believes that there is, in Ivan's words, a "law of nature that men should love mankind," and that if there has been little love on earth hitherto it is not owing to the absence of "natural law" but simply because men have allowed their actions to be directed by culturally

> derived credulities in opposition to natural law ("Dostoevsky's Defense" 62-63).

[3]Again, Dr. Wharton comments on Ivan's attitude towards the idea of man's natural inclination to love his fellow man:

> Ivan...professes to believe that "Christ-like love for men is a miracle impossible on earth" and...asserts that he "could never understand how one can love one's neighbors." From Ivan's standpoint "the experience of active love" is simply an aberration testifying at once to the power of false religious credulities and to an individual's capacity to grow remote from his "essential nature"... According to Ivan there is no "law of nature that men should love mankind"... ("Dostoevsky's Defense" 62-63).

[4]In his Notebooks Dostoevsky has written: "Those villains have mocked me for an uneducated and retrograde faith in God. Those blockheads have never even conceived so powerful a rejection of God as exists in the Inquisitor and the preceding chapter, to which the whole book will serve as an answer" (quoted in Matlaw 679).

[5]Richard Peace also comments that "the plot is constructed in such a way as to give almost equal prominence to each of the brothers" (220). And Avrahm Yarmolinsky notes that Alyosha "embodies the life of the spirit -- faith, goodness,

unstinted loving-kindness," and that this is his necessary function in the novel (386).

[6]Avrahm Yarmolinsky says of Ivan that "he has an intense zest for living and a more exacting conscience than he knows, but he is intended to be the pattern of the intellectual, the man who plays with ideas, the doubter... Like all those characters of Dostoevsky's who succumb to the intellect, he stumbles, he goes astray" (368).

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